

# SELECTED WRITINGS

***ERRICO  
MALATESTA***



ENDS AND MEANS

MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES

MUTUAL AID

REFORMISM

ORGANISATION

7/50R/6/7/5

# SELECTED WRITINGS

**ERRICO  
MALATESTA**

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## 1 ENDS AND MEANS

THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS. THIS SAYING HAS BEEN MUCH abused; yet it is in fact the universal guide to conduct. It would, however, be better to say: every end needs its means. Since morality must be sought in the aims, the means is determined.

Once the goal one is aiming at has been established, consciously or through necessity, the big problem of life is to find the means which, in the circumstances, leads to that end most surely and economically. In the way this problem is solved will depend, so far as it can depend on human will, whether the individual (or party) reaches or fails to achieve his ends, whether he is useful to his cause or unwittingly serves that of the enemy. To have found the right means, herein lies the whole secret of great men and parties that have left their mark on history.

For mystics, the aim of the Jesuits is the glory of God; for others it is the power of the Company of Jesus. They must therefore make every effort to brutalise, terrorise and subject the masses.

The aim of the Jacobins, and all authoritarian parties who believe themselves to be in possession of absolute truth, is to impose their ideas on the ignorant masses. They must therefore make every effort to seize power, subject the masses, and fit humanity to the Procrustian bed of their concepts.

The problem for us is a different one; because our aims are so different, so also must be our means.

We do not carry on our struggle in order to put ourselves in the place of the exploiters and oppressors of today, nor

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do we even struggle for the triumph of an empty abstraction. We have nothing in common with that Italian patriot who declared: "What does it matter if all Italians die of hunger so long as Italy is great and glorious!"; nor even with that comrade who confessed to being indifferent to whether three quarters of humanity perished in making the world free and happy. . . .

In our opinion all action which is directed towards the destruction of economic and political oppression; which serves to raise the moral and intellectual level of the people; which gives them an awareness of their individual rights and their power, and persuades them themselves to act on their own behalf; [in a word] all activity that encourages a hatred of oppression and awakens love among Man, brings us closer to our ends and therefore is a good thing (subject only to a quantitative consideration: of obtaining the best results from the available forces at our disposal). On the other hand, all activity that tends to preserve the present state of affairs, that tends to sacrifice man against his will for the triumph of a principle, is bad because it is a denial of our ends. We seek the triumph of freedom and of love.

Should we, for this reason, renounce the use of violent means? Not at all. Our means are those that circumstances allow and impose.

Of course we do not wish to lay a finger on anyone; we would wish to dry all the tears of humanity and not be responsible for more tears. But we must either struggle in the world as it is or remain helpless dreamers. The day will come, we are convinced of this, when it will be possible to serve the cause of Mankind without hurting either oneself or others; but today this is not possible. Even the purest and gentlest of martyrs, those who would allow themselves to be dragged to the gallows for the triumph of good, without resisting, blessing their persecutors, as did the Christ of the legend, would be doing harm. Besides the harm to their own persons, which after all must be reckoned with too, they would cause bitter tears to be shed by all those who loved them. In all actions in life it is, therefore always a question of seeking

to cause the least harm to achieve the greatest possible good. . . .

Obviously the revolution will be the cause of many tragedies and much suffering; but even if it produced a hundred times more, it would always be a blessing compared with the sufferings which now exist in the world as a result of the evil organisation of society.<sup>1</sup>

There are, and there always have been in all socio-political struggles, two kinds of hypnotisers.

There are those who consider that we are never mature enough, that we expect too much, that we must wait, and be satisfied to advance a little at a time with the aid of small reforms . . . which are periodically won and lost without ever solving anything. And there are those who affect contempt for the small things, and advocate all or nothing, and in putting forward schemes, probably excellent ones which cannot however be realised through lack of sufficient support, prevent, or seek to prevent, others from doing the little that can be done.

For us what is most important is not what we achieve . . . but how we achieve it.

If in order to secure an improvement in the situation one abandons one's basic programme and stops propagating it or struggling to realise it; if one induces the masses to pin their hopes on laws and the good-will of the rulers rather than in their own direct action; if one suffocates the revolutionary spirit, and ceases to foment discontent and resistance—then every advantage will prove illusory and ephemeral, and in all cases will bar the roads to the future society.

But if instead, one does not forget one's final objectives, and encourages the popular forces, as well as inciting to direct action and insurrection, very little may be achieved at the time, but one has made a step forward in the moral preparation of the mass of the people, and in the achievement of a more favourable social climate.

<sup>1</sup> *l'En Dehors* August 17, 1892

"The optimum is enemy of the good" says the proverb: let us do what we can, assuming we cannot do all we would wish; but do something we must.<sup>2</sup>

Another damaging argument sincerely advanced by many, but which for others is an excuse for doing nothing, is that the present social environment does not make morality possible; and that consequently it is useless to make efforts which cannot succeed, and it is therefore best to get all one can for oneself without bothering about others, except to change one's way of life when the social organisation will be changed. Obviously all anarchists and socialists understand the economic facts of life which today oblige man to struggle against man, and any observer will see the importance of a personal struggle against the overwhelming power of the present social environment. But it is also obvious that without revolt by the individual, who joins with others of like mind to offer resistance to the environment in order to change it, it will never change.

All of us, without exception, are obliged to live, more or less, in contradiction with our ideals; but we are anarchists and socialists because, and in so far as, we suffer by this contradiction, and seek to make it as small as possible. In the event of adapting ourselves to the environment, we would of course also lose the desire to change it, and would become ordinary bourgeois; bourgeois without money perhaps, but for all that bourgeois in our actions and intentions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Umanità* Nova June 25, 1922

<sup>3</sup> *l'Anarchia* August 1896



## 2 MAJORITIES AND MINORITIES

WE DO NOT RECOGNISE THE RIGHT OF THE MAJORITY TO IMPOSE the law on the minority, even if the will of the majority in somewhat complicated issues could really be ascertained. The fact of having the majority on one's side does not in any way prove that one must be right. Indeed, humanity has always advanced through the initiative and efforts of individuals and minorities, whereas the majority, by its very nature, is slow, conservative, submissive to superior force and to established privileges.

But if we do not for one moment recognise the right of majorities to dominate minorities, we are even more opposed to domination of the majority by a minority. It would be absurd to maintain that one is right because one is in a minority. If at all times there have been advanced and enlightened minorities, so too have there been minorities which were backward and reactionary; if there are human beings who are exceptional, and ahead of their times, there are also psychopaths, and especially are there apathetic individuals who allow themselves to be unconsciously carried on the tide of events.

In any case it is not a question of being right or wrong; it is a question of freedom, freedom for all, freedom for each individual so long as he does not violate the equal freedom of others. No-one can judge with certainty who is right and who is wrong, who is closer to the truth and which is the best road to the greatest good for each and everyone. Experience through freedom is the only means to arrive at the truth and the best solutions; and there is no freedom if there is not the freedom to be wrong.

In our opinion, therefore, it is necessary that majority and minority should succeed in living together peacefully and profitably by mutual agreement and compromise, by the intelligent recognition of the practical necessities of communal life and of the usefulness of concessions which circumstances make necessary.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Umanità Nova August 11, 1922

## MUTUAL AID

As well as their reason and experience telling them that in spite of using all the alchemy of elections and parliament one always ends up by having laws which represent everything but the will of the majority, anarchists do not recognise that the majority as such, even if it were possible to establish beyond all doubt what it wanted, has the right to impose itself on the dissident minorities by the use of force.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from these considerations, there always exists the fact that in a capitalist regime, in which society is divided into rich and poor, into employers and employees whose next meal depends on the absolute power of the boss, there cannot be really free elections.<sup>3</sup>

## 3 MUTUAL AID

SINCE IT IS A FACT THAT MAN IS A SOCIAL ANIMAL WHOSE existence depends on the continued physical and spiritual relations between human beings, these relations must be based either on affinity, solidarity and love, or on hostility and struggle. If each individual thinks only of his well being, or perhaps that of his small consanguinary or territorial group, he will obviously find himself in conflict with others, and will emerge as victor or vanquished; as the oppressor if he wins, as the oppressed if he loses. Natural harmony, the natural marriage of the good of each with that of all, is the invention of human laziness, which rather than struggle to achieve what it wants assumes that it will be achieved spontaneously, by natural law. In reality, however, natural Man is in a state of continuous conflict with his fellows in his quest for the best, and healthiest site, the most fertile land, and in time, to

<sup>2</sup> Umanità Nova October 6, 1921

<sup>3</sup> Pensiero e Volontà June 15, 1924

exploit the many and varied opportunities that social life creates for some or for others. For this reason human history is full of violence, wars, carnage (besides the ruthless exploitation of the labour of others) and innumerable tyrannies and slavery.

If in the human spirit there had only existed this harsh instinct of wanting to predominate and to profit at the expense of others, humanity would have remained in its barbarous state and the development of order as recorded in history, or in our own times, would not have been possible. This order even at its worst, always represents a kind of tempering of the tyrannical spirit with a minimum of social solidarity, indispensable for a more civilised and progressive life.

But fortunately there exists in Man another feeling which draws him closer to his neighbour, the feeling of sympathy, tolerance, of love, and, thanks to it, mankind became more civilised, and from it grew our idea which aims at making society a true gathering of brothers and friends all working for the common good.

How the feeling arose which is expressed by the so-called moral precepts and which, as it develops, denies the existing morality and substitutes a higher morality, is a subject for research which may interest philosophers and sociologists, but it does not detract from the fact that it exists, independently of the explanations which may be advanced. It is of no importance that it may stem from the primitive, physiological fact of the sex act to perpetuate the human species; or the satisfaction to be derived from the company of one's fellow beings; or the advantages to be derived from union in the struggle against the common enemy and in revolt against the common tyrant; or from the desire for leisure, peace and security that even the victors feel a need for; or perhaps for these and a hundred other reasons combined. It *exists* and it is on its development and growth that we base our hopes for the future of humanity.

"The will of God", "natural laws", "moral laws", the "categorical imperative" of the Kantians, even the "interest clearly understood" of the Utilitarians are all

metaphysical fantasies which get one nowhere. They represent the commendable desire of the human mind to want to explain everything, to want to get to the bottom of things, and could be accepted as provisional hypotheses for further research, were they not, in most cases, the human tendency of never wanting to admit ignorance and preferring wordy explanations devoid of factual content to simply saying "I don't know."

Whatever the explanations anyone may or may not choose to give, the problem remains intact: one must choose between love and hate, between brotherly co-operation and fratricidal struggle, between "altruism" and "egoism."<sup>1</sup>

The needs, tastes, aspirations and interests of mankind are neither similar nor naturally harmonious; often they are diametrically opposed and antagonistic. On the other hand, the life of each individual is so conditioned by the life of others that it would be impossible, even assuming it were convenient to do so, to isolate oneself and live one's own life. Social solidarity is a fact from which no one can escape: it can be freely and consciously accepted and in consequence benefit all concerned, or it can be accepted willy-nilly, consciously or otherwise, in which case it manifests itself by the subjection of one to another, by the exploitation of some by others.

A whole host of practical problems arise in our day-to-day lives which can be solved in different ways, but not by all ways at the same time; yet each individual may prefer one solution to another. If an individual or group have the power to impose their preference on others, they will choose the solution which best suits their interests and tastes; the others will have to submit and sacrifice their wishes. But if no one has the possibility of obliging others to act against their will then, always assuming that it is not possible or considered convenient to adopt more than one solution, one must arrive by mutual concessions at an agreement which best suits everyone and least offends individual interests, tastes and wishes.

<sup>1</sup> Umanità Nova September 16, 1922



History teaches us, daily observation of life around us teaches, that where violence has no place [in human relations] everything is settled in the best possible way, in the best interests of all concerned. But where violence intervenes, injustice, oppression and exploitation invariably triumph.<sup>2</sup>

The fact is that human life is not possible without profiting by the labour of others, and that there are only two ways in which this can be done: either through a fraternal, equalitarian and libertarian association, in which solidarity, consciously and freely expressed unites all mankind; or the struggle of each against the other in which the victors overrule, oppress and exploit the rest. . . .

We want to bring about a society in which men will consider each other as brothers and by mutual support will achieve the greatest well-being and freedom as well as physical and intellectual development for all. . . .

The strongest man is the one who is the least isolated; the most independent is the one who has most contacts and friendships and thereby a wider field for choosing his close collaborators; the most developed man is he who best can, and knows how to, utilise Man's common inheritance as well as the achievements of his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the rivers of human blood; in spite of the indescribable sufferings and humiliations inflicted; in spite of exploitation and tyranny at the expense of the weakest (by reason of personal, or social, inferiority); in a word, in spite of the struggle and all its consequences, that which in human society represents its vital and progressive characteristics, is the feeling of sympathy, the sense of a common humanity which in normal times, places a limit on the struggle beyond which one cannot venture without rousing deep disgust and widespread disapproval. For what intervenes is morality.

The professional historian of the old school may prefer to present the fruits of his research as sensational events, large-

scale conflicts between nations and classes, wars, revolutions, the ins and outs of diplomacy and conspiracies; but what is really much more significant are the innumerable daily contacts between individuals and between groups which are the true substance of social life. And if one closely examines what happens deep down, in the intimate daily lives of the mass of humanity, one finds that as well as the struggle to snatch better working conditions, the thirst for domination, rivalry, envy and all the unhealthy passions which set man against man, is also valuable work, mutual aid, unceasing and voluntary exchange of services, affection, love, friendship and all that which draws people closer together in brotherhood. And human collectivities advance or decay, live or die, depending on whether solidarity and love, or hatred and struggle, predominate in the community's affairs; indeed, the very existence of any community would not be possible if the social feelings, which I would call the *good* passions, were not stronger than the bad.

The existence of sentiments of affection and sympathy among mankind, and the experience and awareness of the individual and social advantages which stem from the development of these sentiments, have produced and go on producing concepts of "justice" and "right" and "Morality" which, in spite of a thousand contradictions, lies and hypocrisy serving base interests, constitute a goal, an ideal towards which humanity advances.

This "morality" is fickle and relative; it varies with the times, with different peoples, classes and individuals; people use it to serve their own personal interests and that of their families, class or country. But discarding what, in official "morality", serves to defend the privilege and violence of the ruling class, there is always something left which is in the general interest and is the common achievement of all mankind, irrespective of class and race.<sup>4</sup>

The bourgeoisie in its heroic period, when it still felt itself a part of the people and fought for emancipation, had sublime

<sup>2</sup> Umanità Nova July 25, 1920

<sup>3</sup> Umanità Nova September 2, 1922

<sup>4</sup> Umanità Nova October 21, 1922

gestures of love and self-abnegation; and the best among its thinkers and martyrs had the almost prophetic vision of that future of peace, brotherhood and well-being which socialists are struggling for today [1909]. But if altruism and solidarity were among the feelings of the best of them, the germ of individualism (in the sense of struggle between individuals), the principle of struggle (as opposed to solidarity) and the exploitation of man by man, were in the programme of the bourgeoisie and could not but give rise to baneful consequences. Individual property and the principle of authority, in the new disguises of capitalism and parliamentarism, were in that programme and had to lead, as has always been the case, to oppression, misery and the dehumanisation of the masses.

And now that the development of capitalism and parliamentarism has borne its fruits, and the bourgeoisie has exhausted every generous sentiment and progressive *élan* by the practice of political and economic competition, it is reduced to having to defend its privileges with force and deceit, while its philosophers cannot defend it against the socialist attacks except by bringing up, inopportunistly, the law of vital competition.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4 REFORMISM

THE FUNDAMENTAL ERROR OF THE REFORMISTS IS THAT OF dreaming of solidarity, a sincere collaboration, between masters and servants, between proprietors and workers which even if it might have existed here and there in periods of profound unconsciousness of the masses and of ingenuous faith in religion and rewards, is utterly impossible today.

<sup>5</sup> Il Pensiero June 1, 1909

Those who envisage a society of well stuffed pigs which waddle contentedly under the ferule of a small number of swineherd; who do not take into account the need for freedom and the sentiment of human dignity; who really believe in a God that orders, for his abstruse ends, the poor to be submissive and the rich to be good and charitable—can also imagine and aspire to a technical organisation of production which assures abundance to all and is at the same time materially advantageous both to the bosses and to the workers. But in reality “social peace” based on abundance for all will remain a dream, so long as society is divided into antagonistic classes, that is employers and employees. And there will be neither peace nor abundance.

The antagonism is spiritual rather than material. There will never be a sincere understanding between bosses and workers for the better exploitation of the forces of nature in the interests of mankind, because the bosses above all want to remain bosses and secure always more power at the expense of the workers, as well as by competition with other bosses, whereas the workers have had their fill of bosses and don’t want more!<sup>1</sup>

[Our good friends] are wasting their time when they tell us that a little freedom is better than a brutal and unbridled tyranny; that a reasonable working day, a wage that allows people to live better than animals, and protection of women and children, are preferable to the exploitation of human labour to the point of human exhaustion; or that the State school, bad as it is, is always better, from the point of view of the child’s moral development, than schools run by priests and monks . . . for we are in complete agreement. And we also agree that there may be circumstances in which the Election results, national or local, can have good or bad consequences and that this vote might be determined by the anarchists’ votes if the strength of the rival parties were equally balanced.

In most cases it is an illusion; when elections are tolerably free, the only value they have is symbolic: they indicate the

<sup>1</sup> Umanità Nova May 10, 1922



state of public opinion, which would have imposed itself by more efficacious means, and with more far reaching results, if it had not been offered the outlet of elections. But no matter; even if some minor advances were the direct result of an electoral victory, anarchists should not flock to the polling booths or cease to preach their methods of struggle.

Since no one can do everything in this world, one must choose one's own line of conduct.

There is always an element of contradiction between minor improvements, the satisfaction of immediate needs and the struggle for a society which is really better than the existing one. Those who want to devote themselves to the erection of public lavatories and drinking fountains where there is a need for them, or who use their energies for the construction of a road, or the establishment of a municipal school, or for the passing of some minor law to protect workers or to get rid of a brutal policeman, do well, perhaps, to use their ballot paper in favour of this or that influential personage. But then - since one wants to be "practical" one must go the whole hog - so, rather than wait for the victory of the opposition party, rather than vote for the more kindred party, it is worth taking a short cut and support the dominant party, and serve the government already in office, and become the agent of the Prefect or the Mayor. And in fact the neo-converts we have in mind did not in fact propose voting for the most "progressive" party, but for the one that had the greater chance of being elected . . . But in that case where does it all end? . . .<sup>2</sup>

In the course of human history it is generally the case that the malcontents, the oppressed, and the rebels, before being able to conceive and desire a radical change in the political and social institutions, restrict their demands to partial changes, to concessions by the rulers, and to improvements. Hopes of obtaining reforms as well as in their efficacy, precede the conviction that in order to destroy the power of a

government or of a class, it is necessary to deny the reasons for that power, and therefore to make a revolution.

In the order of things, reforms are then introduced or they are not, and once introduced either consolidate the existing regime or undermine it; assist the advent of revolution or hamper it and benefit or harm progress in general, depending on their specific characteristic, the spirit in which they have been granted, and above all, the spirit in which they are asked for, claimed or seized by the people.

Governments and the privileged classes are naturally always guided by instincts of self-preservation, of consolidation and the development of their powers and privileges; and when they consent to reforms it is either because they consider that they will serve their ends or because they do not feel strong enough to resist, and give in, fearing what might otherwise be a worse alternative.

The oppressed, either ask for and welcome improvements as a benefit graciously conceded, recognise the legitimacy of the power which is over them, and so do more harm than good by helping to slow down, or divert and perhaps even stop the processes of emancipation. Or instead they demand and impose improvements by their action, and welcome them as partial victories over the class enemy, using them as a spur to greater achievements, and thus they are a valid help and a preparation to the total overthrow of privilege, that is, for the revolution. A point is reached when the demands of the dominated class cannot be acceded to by the ruling class without compromising their power. Then the violent conflict inevitably occurs.

It is not true to say therefore, that revolutionaries are systematically opposed to improvements, to reforms. They oppose the reformists on the one hand because their methods are less effective for securing reforms from governments and employers, who only give in through fear, and on the other hand because very often the reforms they prefer are those which not only bring doubtful immediate benefits, but also serve to consolidate the existing regime and to give the workers a vested interest in its continued existence. Thus, for

<sup>2</sup> Pensiero e Volontà May 15, 1924

instance, State pensions, insurance schemes, as well as profit sharing schemes in agricultural and industrial enterprises, etc.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the unpleasantness of the word which has been abused and discredited by politicians, anarchism has always been, and can never be anything but, reformist. We prefer to say *reformative* in order to avoid any possible confusion with those who are officially classified as "reformists" and seek by means of small and often ephemeral improvements to make the present system more bearable (and as a result help to consolidate it); or who instead believe in good faith that it is possible to eliminate the existing social evils by recognising and respecting, in practice if not in theory, the basic political and economic institutions which are the cause of, as well as the prop that supports these evils. But in any case it is always a question of reforms, and the essential difference lies in the kind of reform one wants and the way one thinks of being able to achieve it. Revolution means, in the historical sense of the word, the radical reform of institutions, achieved rapidly by the violent insurrection of the people against existing power and privileges; and we are revolutionaries and insurrectionists because we do not just want to improve existing institutions but to destroy them completely, abolishing every form of domination by man over man, and every kind of parasitism on human labour; and because we want to achieve this as quickly as possible, and because we believe that institutions born of violence are maintained by violence and will not give way except to an equivalent violence. But the revolution cannot be made just when one likes. Should we remain inactive, waiting for the situation to mature with time?

And even after a successful insurrection, could we overnight realise all our desires and pass from a governmental and capitalist hell to a libertarian-communist heaven which is the complete freedom of man within the wished-for community of interests with all men?

<sup>3</sup> Umanità Nova September 10, 1920

These are illusions which can take root among authoritarians who look upon the masses as the raw material which those who have power can, by decrees, supported by bullets and handcuffs, mould to their will. But these illusions have not taken among anarchists. We need the people's consensus, and therefore we must persuade by means of propaganda and example, we must educate and seek to change the environment in such a way that this education may reach an ever increasing number of people. . . .

We are reformers today in so far as we seek to create the most favourable conditions and as large a body of enlightened militants so that an insurrection by the people would be brought to a satisfactory conclusion. We shall be reformers tomorrow, after a triumphant insurrection, and the achievement of freedom, in that we will seek with all the means that freedom permits, that is by propaganda, example and even violent resistance against anyone who should wish to restrict our freedom in order to win over to our ideas an ever greater number of people.

But we will never recognise the institutions; we will take or win all possible reforms with the same spirit that one tears occupied territory from the enemy's grasp in order to go on advancing, and we will always remain enemies of every government, whether it be that of the monarchy today, or the republican or bolshevik governments of tomorrow.<sup>4</sup>

## 5 ORGANISATION

ORGANISATION WHICH IS, AFTER ALL, ONLY THE PRACTICE OF co-operation and solidarity, is a natural and necessary condition of social life; it is an inescapable fact which forces itself on everybody, as much on human society in general as on

<sup>4</sup> Pensiero e Volontà March 1, 1924



any group of people who are working towards a common objective. Since man neither wishes to, nor can, live in isolation—indeed being unable to develop his personality, and satisfy his physical and moral needs outside society and without the co-operation of his fellow beings—it is inevitable that those people who have neither the means nor a sufficiently developed social conscience to permit them to associate freely with those of a like mind and with common interests, are subjected to organisation by others, generally constituted in a class or as a ruling group, with the aim of exploiting the labour of others for their personal advantage. And the age-long oppression of the masses by a small privileged group has always been the result of the inability of most workers to agree among themselves to organise with others for production, for enjoyment and for the possible needs of defence against whoever might wish to exploit and oppress them. Anarchism exists to remedy this state of affairs. . . .<sup>1</sup>

There are two factions among those who call themselves anarchists, with or without adjectives: supporters and opponents of organisation. If we cannot succeed in agreeing, let us, at least, try to understand each other.

And first of all let us be clear about the distinctions, since the question is a triple one: organisation in general as a principle and condition of social life today and in a future society; the organisation of the anarchist movement; and the organisation of the popular forces and especially of the working masses for resistance to government and capitalism. . . .

The basic error committed by those opposed to organisation is in believing that organisation is not possible without authority.

Now, it seems to us that organisation, that is to say, association for a specific purpose and with the structure and means required to attain it, is a necessary aspect of social life. A man in isolation cannot even live the life of a beast, for he is unable to obtain nourishment for himself except in tropical regions or when the population is exceptionally sparse; and

he is, without exception, unable to rise much above the level of the animals. Having therefore to join with other humans, or more accurately, finding himself united to them as a consequence of the evolutionary antecedents of the species, he must submit to the will of others (be enslaved) or subject others to his will (be in authority) or live with others in fraternal agreement in the interests of the greatest good of all (be an associate). Nobody can escape from this necessity; and the most extreme anti-organisers not only are subject to the general organisation of the society they live in, but also in the voluntary actions in their lives, and in their rebellion against organisation, they unite among themselves, they share out their tasks, they *organise* with whom they are in agreement, and use the means that society puts at their disposal. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Admitting as a possibility the existence of a community organised without authority, that is without compulsion—and anarchists must admit the possibility, or anarchy would have no meaning—let us pass on to discuss the organisation of the anarchist movement.

In this case too, organisation seems useful and necessary. If movement means the whole—individuals with a common objective which they exert themselves to attain—it is natural that they should agree among themselves, join forces, share out the tasks and take all those steps which they think will lead to the achievement of those objectives. To remain isolated, each individual acting or seeking to act on his own without co-ordination, without preparation, without joining his modest efforts to a strong group, means condemning oneself to impotence, wasting one's efforts in small ineffectual action, and to lose faith very soon in one's aims and possibly being reduced to complete inactivity. . . .

A mathematician, a chemist, a psychologist or a sociologist may say they have no programme or are concerned only with establishing the truth. They seek knowledge, they are not seeking to *do* something. But anarchy and socialism are not

<sup>1</sup> Il Risveglio, October 15, 1927

<sup>2</sup> L'Agitazione, June 4, 1897



sciences; they are proposals, projects, that anarchists and socialists seek to realise and which, therefore need to be formulated as definite programmes. . . .

If it is true that [organisation creates leaders]; if it is true that anarchists are unable to come together and arrive at agreement without submitting themselves to an authority, this means that they are not yet very good anarchists, and before thinking of establishing anarchy in the world they must think of making themselves able to live anarchistically. The remedy does not lie in the abolition of organisation but in the growing consciousness of each individual member. . . . In small as well as large societies, apart from brute force, of which it cannot be a question for us, the origin and justification for authority lies in social disorganisation.

When a community has needs and its members do not know how to organise spontaneously to provide them, someone comes forward, an authority who satisfies those needs by utilising the services of all and directing them to his liking. If the roads are unsafe and the people do not know what measures to take, a police force emerges which in return for whatever services it renders expects to be supported and paid, as well as imposing itself and throwing its weight around; if some article is needed, and the community does not know how to arrange with the distant producers to supply it in exchange for goods produced locally, the merchant will appear who will profit by dealing with the needs of one section to sell and of the other to buy, and impose his own prices both on the producer and the consumer. This is what has happened in our midst; the less organised we have been the more prone are we to be imposed on by a few individuals. And this is understandable. . . .

So much so that organisation, far from creating authority, is the only cure for it and the only means whereby each one of us will get used to taking an active and conscious part in collective work, and cease being passive instruments in the hands of leaders. . . .

But an organisation, it is argued, presupposes an obligation to co-ordinate one's own activities with those of others;

thus it violates liberty and fetters initiative. As we see it, what really takes away liberty and makes initiative impossible is the isolation which renders one powerless. Freedom is not an abstract right but the possibility of acting: this is true among ourselves as well as in society as a whole. And it is by co-operation with his fellows that man finds the means to express his activity and his power of initiative.<sup>3</sup>

An anarchist organisation must, in my opinion [allow for] complete autonomy, and independence, and therefore full responsibility, to individuals and groups; free agreement between those who think it useful to come together for co-operative action, for common aims; a moral duty to fulfil one's pledges and to take no action which is contrary to the accepted programme. On such bases one then introduces practical forms and the suitable instruments to give real life to the organisation. Thus the groups, the federation of groups, the federations of federations, meetings, congresses, correspondence committees and so on. But this also must be done freely, in such a way as not to restrict the thought and the initiative of individual members, but only to give greater scope to the efforts which in isolation would be impossible or ineffective. Thus for an anarchist organisation congresses, in spite of all the disadvantages from which they suffer as representative bodies . . . are free from authoritarianism in any shape or form because they do not legislate and do not impose their deliberations on others. They serve to maintain and increase personal contacts among the most active comrades, to summarise and encourage programmatic studies on the ways and means for action; to acquaint everybody with the situation in the regions and the kind of action most urgently needed; to summarise the various currents of anarchist opinions at the time and to prepare some kind of statistics therefrom. And their decisions are not binding but simply suggestions, advice and proposals to submit to all concerned, and they do not become binding and executive except for those who accept them and for as long as they accept them. The admini-

<sup>3</sup> L'Agitazione, June 11, 1897

strative organs they nominate—Correspondence Commissions, etc.—have no directive powers, do not take initiatives except for those who specifically solicit and approve of them, and have no authority to impose their own views, which they can certainly hold and propagate as groups of comrades, but which cannot be presented as the official views of the organisation. They publish the resolutions of the congresses and the opinions and proposals communicated to them by groups and individuals; and they act for those who want to make use of them, to facilitate relations between groups, and co-operation between those who are in agreement on various initiatives; each is free to correspond with whoever he likes direct, or to make use of other committees nominated by specific groupings.

In an anarchist organisation individual members can express any opinion and use every tactic which is not in contradiction with the accepted principles and does not interfere with the activities of others. In every case a particular organisation lasts so long as the reasons for union are superior to those for dissension: otherwise it disbands and makes way for other, more homogenous groupings.

Certainly the life and permanence of an organisation is a condition for success in the long struggle before us, and besides, it is natural that every institution should by instinct aim at lasting indefinitely. But the duration of a libertarian organisation must be the result of the spiritual affinity of its members and of the adaptability of its constitution to the continually changing circumstances. When it can no longer serve a useful purpose it is better that it should die.<sup>4</sup>

We would certainly be happy if we could all get along well together and unite all the forces of anarchism in a strong movement; but we do not believe in the solidity of organisations which are built up on concessions and assumptions and in which there is no real agreement and sympathy between members.

Better disunited than badly united. But we would wish

that each individual joined his friends and that there should be no isolated forces, or lost forces.<sup>5</sup>

It remains for us to speak of the organisation of the working masses for resistance against both the government and the employers.

... Workers will never be able to emancipate themselves so long as they do not find in union the moral, economic and physical strength that is needed to subdue the organised might of the oppressors.

There have been anarchists, and there are still some, who while recognising the need to organise today for propaganda and action, are hostile to all organisations which do not have anarchism as their goal or which do not follow anarchist methods of struggle. . . . To those comrades it seemed that all organised forces for an objective less than radically revolutionary, were forces that the revolution was being deprived of. It seems to us instead, and experience has surely already confirmed our view, that their approach would condemn the anarchist movement to a state of perpetual sterility. To make propaganda we must be amongst the people, and it is in the workers' associations that workers find their comrades and especially those who are most disposed to understand and accept our ideas. But even when it were possible to do as much propaganda as we wished outside the associations, this could not have a noticeable effect on the working masses. Apart from a small number of individuals more educated and capable of abstract thought and theoretical enthusiasms, the worker cannot arrive at anarchism in one leap. To become a convinced anarchist, and not in name only, he must begin to feel the solidarity that joins him to his comrades, and to learn to co-operate with others in the defence of common interests and that, by struggling against the bosses and against the government which supports them, should realise that bosses and governments are useless parasites and that the workers could manage the domestic economy by their own efforts. And when the worker has understood this, he is an

<sup>4</sup> Il Risveglio, October 15, 1927

<sup>5</sup> L'Agitazione, June 11, 1897



anarchist even if he does not call himself such.

Furthermore, to encourage popular organisations of all kinds is the logical consequence of our basic ideas, and should therefore be an integral part of our programme.

An authoritarian party, which aims at capturing power to impose its ideas, has an interest in the people remaining an amorphous mass, unable to act for themselves and therefore always easily dominated. And it follows, logically, that it cannot desire more than that much organisation, and of the kind it needs to attain power: Electoral organisations if it hopes to achieve it by legal means; Military organisation if it relies on violent action.

But we anarchists do not want to *emancipate* the people; we want the people to *emancipate themselves*. We do not believe in the good that comes from above and imposed by force; we want the new way of life to emerge from the body of the people and correspond to the state of their development and advance as they advance. It matters to us therefore that all interests and opinions should find their expression in a conscious organisation and should influence communal life in proportion to their importance.

We have undertaken the task of struggling against existing social organisation, and of overcoming the obstacles to the advent of a new society in which freedom and well being would be assured to everybody. To achieve this objective we organise ourselves in a party and seek to become as numerous and as strong as possible. But if it were only our party that was organised; if the workers were to remain isolated like so many units unconcerned about each other and only linked by the common chain; if we ourselves besides being organised as anarchists in a party, were not as workers organised with other workers, we could achieve nothing at all, or at most, we might be able to impose ourselves . . . and then it would not be the triumph of anarchy but our triumph. We could then go on calling ourselves anarchists, but in reality we should simply be rulers, and as impotent as all rulers are where the general good is concerned.\*

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